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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515
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President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

For many years we have lulled ourselves with the idea that radicalization was not happening inside the United States. We believed American Muslims were immune to radicalization because, unlike their European counterparts, they are socially and economically well integrated into society. There had been warnings that these assumptions were false, but we paid them no mind.

Today, there is no doubt that radicalization is taking place inside America. The strikingly accelerated rate of American Muslims arrested for involvement in terrorist activities since May 2009 makes this fact self-evident.¹ What has been missed is that our homegrown terrorists are now becoming a global threat.

Some of these recent terrorism cases have actually highlighted a reality that was virtually inconceivable only five years ago. Cases such as those of David Headley, "Jihad Jane," the "Northern Virginia five," and Christopher Paul have shown America not only produces its own terrorists but, in some cases, even exports them. This new phenomenon of "exporting terrorism" is now causing concern among our overseas allies—making it even more urgent we address this menacing threat.

It goes without saying that the vast majority of American Muslims are law-abiding citizens. They abhor violence and extremism no less than any other American. Yet, sadly, it has become obvious that small pockets of extremism do exist and pose a threat to our national security. It follows that the government should do more to stem the radicalization process that is affecting a small, yet growing, segment of the American Muslim population.

However, we cannot stem radicalization when many U.S. officials are peddling the idea that grievances are the main driver of it. They assume that if grievances are addressed, individuals will not radicalize and commit acts of terrorism. To the contrary, case after case shows that grievances are not the sole driver of terrorism.

Many of the individuals arrested over the last few years did not come from underprivileged backgrounds. They had university educations, gratifying jobs and solid links to American society; showing that poverty and lack of integration are not the main drivers for radicalization. These factors unquestionably play a role in the radicalization and recruitment of militants in places like Somalia or Pakistan. However, individuals like Faisal Shahzad, Farooque Ahmed and Tareq Mehanna embodied

¹ Jerome P. Bjelopera and Mark A. Randol, "American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat," *Congressional Research Service*, December 7, 2010.

the American dream, at least socio-economically. Moreover, Americans who have been arrested for their involvement in terrorist activities over the last few years represent a remarkably diverse group in terms of ethnicity, education, age, and socio-economic backgrounds.

The truth is that if grievances were the sole cause of terrorism, we would see daily terrorist acts by Americans who have lost their jobs and homes in this economic downturn. To know what is really at the root of homegrown terrorism, we need to listen to the homegrown terrorists themselves.

Omar Hammami, an Alabama-born convert to Islam, is currently occupying a high-ranking position in al-Shabaab. He makes clear statements about ideology, not grievances, being the key driver of terrorism. Writing to his sister, Hammami said: "They can't blame it on poverty or any of that stuff...They will have to realize that it's an ideology and it's a way of life that makes people change".²

Government officials need to heed this message. We must stop concentrating solely on grievances and instead start to study and address the extremist ideology that is radicalizing our youth. Therefore, any U.S. counter-radicalization effort must be focused on addressing this ideology.

Unfortunately, America knows little about the ideology that drives terrorism. We are far behind our allies in Europe who have been studying extremist ideology for some time now. If we are to truly stem the rising tide of homegrown terrorism, we must follow the act of some European countries—we must move beyond addressing bombs and bullets to winning hearts and minds.

This issue is paramount to me because Samir Khan was once operating in his parent's basement in my hometown of Charlotte, North Carolina.³ He is now Anwar al-Awlaki's protégé and one of al-Qaida's top propagandists in Yemen. Had we been able to stop Khan, our youth would not be exposed to his online magazine, *Inspire*. This magazine encourages them to join al-Qaida's fight by creating bombs in their mom's kitchen and driving pickup trucks into pedestrians.

I believe Republicans and Democrats can work together to address this national security threat. As such, I urge you to hold a bipartisan meeting on counter-radicalization at the White House so Congressional leaders can discuss these issues with you and national security officials. This would be a great tool to help educate the public about the causes of homegrown terrorism. It would also show them that the government is united against the rising tide of radicalization.

I look forward to working with your Administration on this issue of grave importance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Myrick".

Sue Myrick
Member of Congress

² Andrea Elliott, "The Jihadist Next Door," *New York Times*, January 27, 2010.

³ Dina Temple-Raston, "Grand Jury Focuses On N.C. Man Tied To Jihad Magazine," *National Public Radio*, August 18, 2010.